

LIVELIHOOD IN SILWA

556 back'. He added that the prophetic tradition runs that if people are contented, God will look after them as He looks after the birds that leave their nests on feeling hungry and return to them well satisfied. Another prophetic tradition maintains that there are two types of people whose hunger is never satisfied, the searcher for knowledge and the searcher for wealth, and while the first is praised the second is condemned. This does not mean that the Koran or the prophetic tradition encourages apathy, as one can quote other statements conducive to hard work. But the mere fact that the statements, related by Ali and uttered by a great number of the literate villagers, are those exalting contentment, asceticism and submission to fate, to the exclusion of any others, shows a kind of selectivity in values entertained by the villagers. The writer was struck, however, by the amount of frugality and economic calculations of the villagers, in spite of their being frequently dubbed as fatalists. Their fatalism is usually a justification for the misfortune that befalls them, as epitomized by their saying, 'What is written on the forehead, must be seen by the eye'. On the other hand, they have another maxim saying that 'If one's back itches, there's nothing like one's finger to scratch it and give comfort'. Contentment thus actually means satisfaction with what one can get without the undue strain of striving to get ahead or the strenuous efforts for satisfying numerous material demands. It would be very difficult, with the fellah's simple tools and the sweat involved in his work, to convince him that his lot could be improved by more work. 'Both attitudes—contentment and acquisitiveness—have their own social context. Contentment is adopted in a close economy; acquisitiveness in an expanding economy. Without economic opportunities the striving for material gain is a disturbance to existing order, since it means the plunder of wealth from others. Whatever form this plunder may take, it is a curse to the common man. Therefore, to accept and be satisfied with the social role and material rewards given by the society is essential. But when economic opportunity develops through the development of technology, and when wealth can be acquired through exploitation of nature instead of through the exploitation of man, the doctrine of contentment becomes reactionary because it restricts individual initiative.'

464 The attitude of contentment manifests itself also in those villagers who work in towns, for immediately they feel that they have enough money to last them for some time, they return to the village to live amongst their people till they run short of money, whereupon they return to the town.

476 Contentment as a value, however, does not, of course, prevent the villagers from looking at things and acts in economic terms. Even the welter of their formal and informal social contacts has an economic significance. Help given to friends and relatives is a debt which is expected to be returned, in spite of the magnanimous phrases associated with its rendering, such as 'There is no calculation between us' or 'It makes no difference'.
H. Fei and C. Chang, *Rural China*, London, 1949, p. 84.

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMUNITY

613 during the month of Ramadan, when families co-operate in providing the
574 'Koran reciter' as well as other guests with tea and food.

613 Identification with the clan sentiment shows itself in cases of murder,
682 where the clans of both the murderer and the murdered are involved. It is
609 the obligation of the father, son, brother, uncle or paternal cousin to call
for vengeance and for the clan to support him, either by claiming compensation (which, however, is seldom accepted if the claim is acknowledged)

or by counter-murder, as the Koran ordains that murder should be punished with murder. The two clans through the mediation of another clan have to settle the dispute by deciding the compensation, called 'dia'.

156 This is no Durkheimian merging of the individual into the group. It is simply a statement of the compelling moral law that the individual, to be in line with the group, should express group-sympathy; if the group is angry, he should be angry, if it is insulted, he must feel that he is insulted.

182 This pattern of social structure does not apply merely to the Silwa community and the G'afra, but applies in varying degrees to the whole province of Aswan, and many other provinces that are known to the writer in Upper Egypt. In all this, the bond of common descent and family connections is one of the strongest factors as well as the most socially effective force in the social structure.

561 The village could also be classified into social groups on the basis of age. From the standpoint of age there are three broad social groupings. The first is referred to as 'youngsters' (jahhal), including all boys and girls up to the age of twelve or thirteen years. The second is the unmarried group (fityan), and the third is represented by the married adults, referred to as 'men or women'.

[291] In public there is no free mixing between these three categories as it is considered 'impolite' for a youngster to sit with men, for example, and the converse would be shameful. Youngsters can only be seen in an adult gathering serving tea, or holding the ablution laver and ewer, or as messengers. In the case of young boys, they are marked by their head cap, while unmarried boys wear a turban, and the men besides a turban wear a 'tob' which is a black outer garment, and usually carry a stick or a staff.

561 Apart from segregation and dress, the age criterion shows itself in outward behaviour, by considering the older people as equivalent to the paternal uncle, or as fathers, or grandfathers if they are very old. Often
888 older people are addressed by the kinship term 'Ammy' (O my paternal uncle), especially if one wants to be 'polite'. If one does not use the kinship term one has to address the older person by the title 'Sheikh' preceding his first name.

560 Sex is another criterion for two definite social groups: the world of men, and the world of women. In this community it is unthinkable to have free mixing between the two worlds, or that a thing done by one sex can also be done by a member of the other sex. Men have their scope of activities either in the fields or outside the compound, the women are mainly con-

Notions connected with life and death are, on the whole, mixed up with religion. To die on holy days, such as Fridays or in the month of Ramadan, is a sign of God's blessing.

Sanctity shows itself also in status and rank and their role in the community. According to the villagers, the 'ashraf' (people of distinguished descent being related to the Prophet) have a better chance of salvation than others, a notion which, of course, satisfies the villagers' ego as they consider themselves descendants of the Prophet. The persistence of the religious prerogatives of the 'ashraf' goes to show that the central conception of Islam in the equality of all believers has not entirely supplanted the Arab reverence for distinguished genealogy.

The villagers' attitude of respect for religious men is based on two principles. The first is that of knowledge of Koranic studies, combined with observation of religious duties; the second is derived from hereditary piety, as recognized piety is believed to be handed from father to son. The example of the two pious men acknowledged and venerated as such by the villagers is perhaps the best illustration. One of these two pious sheikhs is the son of the villagers' deceased saint around whose shrine the tombs of the villagers' cemetery is spread. As this sheikh does not live in the village, he frequently comes to it either for an ordinary visit, for taking part in settling serious disputes between individuals or families, or to collect his annual custom of crops offered to him by the villagers during harvest time. During his stay he moves from one guest house to another as the guest of a clan or a family which endeavours to provide hospitality for him and thus win his approval. In return, the sheikh is requested to write charms, or to bless water, or to read over a sick person, and thus secure his 'baraka'.¹

The piety of the other religious man is based also on the fact that he is the grandson of a man who was one of the favourite disciples of the chief founder of the Nakshbadia mystic sect. His grandfather is reputed to have done miraculous deeds and had composed mystic verses usually recited amongst the members of the sect. His piety is also based on the grounds that he studied at al-Azhar Mosque and thus he is considered to be well versed in Koranic studies. It was because of his piety that he gained most of the votes in Silwa, when he stood as a candidate for the Parliament as mentioned earlier.

It is also recognized that people who know the sacred book by heart should be venerated as the carriers of knowledge, and many people regard them as possessed of 'baraka'. In Arab councils, religious men are always

Moreover, the main events of life and death have their religious significance or at least their sanction. It is in the Prophet's tradition to celebrate the naming ceremony, to circumcise children, and to get them married.

¹ This sheikh died during my field work and a delegation from the village went to his village in condolence.

FOLK LIFE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE VILLAGE

to and decided by a Government superior to local sanctions, the esteem of local institutions has been undermined and the traditional structure of authority has lost some of its grip. 178
642

If the villagers have increasingly resorted to Government procedures in their disputes, they still consider both Government and Government officials as agencies of imposition and control, and hence to be feared. The identification of any Effendi wearing European suit and fez with a policeman is indicative of the role of the Government in the people's mind. The first strong impact of centralized Government was probably during the reign of Mohammed Ali, when its pressures were felt through conscription, the rigid collection of taxes, and the registration of land. For a long time in Egypt this apprehension held towards the Government was connected with education, since education and conscription were associated during the days of Mohammed Ali, while hitherto war had been the business of a certain caste and farmers were not concerned with it. The fear of Government authorities is reflected in the story of the old man in the village who had been very annoyed and did not speak to his son for a long time because the latter was entangled in a dispute for which the father had to be called to the police station to give evidence. The father considered his going to the police station as a humiliation brought to him by his son. 641
177

It is also considered as a betrayal to report cases of infectious diseases to the authorities, as this would cause trouble to the family by involving the father and the mother in governmental queries and procedures. To keep away from governmental institutions was always the safest policy. An example of this is the failure of the branch of the Agricultural Credit Bank established in 1938 to help the farmers to have their crops secured, to borrow money accordingly, and thus to rescue them from falling a prey to usury. The bank has been in fact mainly used by outside crop merchants to buy crops from the village and store them until prices improved. It only functioned to its full capacity during the last war when governmental legislation compelled every farmer to sell part of his crop to the Government according to the land he cultivated. The villagers have never taken to the benefits of the bank, partly because it involved becoming implicated with Government procedures, and partly because it implied loss of prestige, due to dealing with interest, which is religiously forbidden. For the same reason, life insurance is never entertained by the villagers, nor by a great section of the Egyptian society as a whole, partly because it involves interest, as well as because it presents a challenge to man's destiny. In 1950 the branch of the bank in the village had to be closed down. Yet this does not mean that usury is not practised amongst the villagers in Silwa in spite of being condemned by the Koran, although it is not widespread and is avoided as much as possible.¹ 641
744
655
641
558
779
753
756
706

¹ M. Gaudetroy-Demombynes, in talking about the Koranic prohibition of 'riba' (increase, interest) in Moslem society remarks that 'it was in that very society ... that

BIRTH, INFANCY AND EARLY TRAINING

858
842
[783] pride in the number of my followers in comparison with those of other nations". If sons and daughters behave uprightly they will act as a means of redeeming the parents' sin. Any good action by the child, e.g. giving alms, helping the weak, digging a well, would also benefit the parents. Parents who have left unworthy children have left "dust" behind.'

858
779 My informant went on to say: 'Children are the glory of this world, as the Koran says "Money and children are the joy of this life". Another statement of the Koran says: "God give us a good thing in this world and a good thing in the next world". The Koran interpreters consider that, in this context, "the good thing of this world" implies children. Children are also referred to as sowing seeds, as it is through these seeds that the corn reproduces itself.'

593
554
[595] As for the wife, she attains her proper status only as a mother, and a childless woman is in an insecure position, as her husband is socially justified in remarrying, to have children. For a newly-married couple to have a child is a step towards partaking of some individuality in the larger family circle. The wife is referred to as 'mother of the children' and whenever a man is asked about his wife, she is frequently referred to also as the 'mother of the first-born boy' and the same applies also to the father, and this reference is more common in public gatherings.

842 My informant, Mahmoud, told me that there were ten childless women in the village and that they were therefore known by everybody. Out of these ten, two were living with husbands who had taken a second wife. He continued, 'A childless woman is usually like a she-camel who does not conceive, puts on more and more flesh, and gets younger every day—but not fruitful, as she can never "lengthen" her husband's neck amongst the menfolk. She is a sore eye to her family. The proper woman is the one who is an "envelope for conception".' It is not strange, then, that a fat woman is a desirable ideal, as she has more room to bear the child, lactates abundantly and gives more warmth to her children.

858
593
562
[736]
[737] It is appropriate here to discuss the differential value of boys and girls in Silwa. The importance of the boys' work in the fields as a major contribution to the family's means of subsistence was discussed earlier. Moreover, the boys are considered to be the best capital investment for ageing parents. They are expected to form the basis for social and economic security, not only for their parents, but also for any widowed sisters. This duty to support their parents or those female relatives who have no other man to support them is legally enforced by the religious courts. This question gives rise to endless disputes; one hears of parents suing their children for support according to their means, or at least threatening to sue them. No such obligations devolve on the daughters, as they are wives of their husbands, and no claim can be made against them.

554
562 Boys are also an added qualification for social prestige. A man with more sons backing him up can always speak with more authority and rank high in the community's esteem even if he owns less land. Fathers who have

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND EVENTS OF CHILDHOOD

852 occasion, even if they live with the father in the same household. Dispute
 867 between brothers or sisters is usually an irrelevant factor in the exchange
 [593] of mutual contributions which are morally compulsory on such occasions. The ideal of the family solidarity must be expressed, at least formally at public ceremonies. The sociological significance of the ceremony cannot be exaggerated, as it must take place even in the case of children whose foreskin is congenitally contracted or damaged by disease. Although such children are believed to be circumcised by the angels, the ceremony is still held, even without any operation on the child.

852 Traditionally, one of the main justifications for holding the ceremony is
 979 the religious significance attached to it throughout the whole Moslem world. To be a Moslem, it is believed, is to be circumcised as distinguished from the non-Moslems, who for the most part are not circumcised. However, there is no text in the Koran that enjoins circumcision upon the Moslem, and it is only mentioned in the prophetic tradition. It is maintained that circumcision was the practice not only of the Prophet Mohammed, but all previous prophets, such as Abraham, Noah, Hud, Saleh, Joseph, Moses, and Solomon. In the prophetic sayings there is no fixed time for the performance of circumcision, as amongst the Jews; it is, however, preferable to have it done before the boy attains maturity. It is reported that the Prophet said, 'Abraham, the friend of the Merciful, was the first man who entertained guests, the first man who underwent circumcision, the first man who shortened his moustache, and the first man who saw grey hairs. He asked, on seeing the grey hairs: "O Lord, what is this?" The Almighty and Glorious Lord said: "Dignity, O Abraham." He said: "O Lord, increase dignity in me." Another prophetic tradition says, 'Circumcision is my way for men, but is merely ennobling for women'. It is also reported that the Prophet told a woman who was just converted into Islam and was thinking of being circumcised, 'Don't inflict trouble on yourself, because that is painful to a wife, but pleasing to a husband'.¹

852 The chain of authorities for most of the Prophet's dicta about circum-
 [199] cision is more often than not weak, and one is justified in regarding them as open to question. The four Schools of Moslem Law differ as to the obligatory nature of circumcision.² The practice, however, was widespread, though not universal, in pagan Arabia, and to be uncircumcised — 'aghral' or 'aghlaf' — was thought disgraceful. Modern educated Moslems might justify circumcision on hygienic grounds, but the writer did not get any such explicit or implicit explanation from the villagers. For [183] the latter, it literally means religious purification, which makes the person

¹ *Mishkat-al-Mamalik*, English translation by al-Hajj Mustafa-Faizul Karim, Vol. I, pp. 737-8.

² *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Article, 'Circumcision (Muhammadan)', by D. S. Margoliouth. In the same source under 'Circumcision (Ancient Egypt)', it is mentioned that this ritual was practised in Ancient Egypt, although there is no decisive evidence with regard to either its generality or the nature of its practice.

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND EVENTS OF CHILDHOOD

fit for prayers. It is not uncommon, whether amongst children or adults, to describe a person as disgraceful by saying that he has still got the foreskin. The relation between circumcision and ceremonial purity is also confirmed by the fact that those boys whose prepuce is absent are considered to be purified by the angels. The circumcised boy's dress, that of a religious man in open white shift and a green outer garment, could be also taken as evidence for the purificatory significance of the ritual.

It must be pointed out here that the circumcision of girls has never had the universality of that of the boys; the religious authority behind it is very weak and could be rejected, and even its practice is not universal throughout the Moslem world at present. On the other hand, some of the prophetic traditions, as mentioned earlier, do not specify its desirability for the female, and the absence of such a definite religious backing for it should render its abandonment comparatively easy. It is argued that circumcision of girls, by removing the clitoris, which is regarded as the centre of excitement, is deemed necessary for ensuring pre-marital chastity.¹ Such a statement was mentioned to the writer by the midwife in Silwa before he became aware of it in anthropological literature. The need for the control of any sexual excitability is understandable in a religiously puritanic community which considers any form of emotional stimulus, either through glance or touch, from any member of the opposite sex, other than the husband or wife, as sinful.

The circumcision ceremony could be considered as a public declaration of the child's sex, with the father as socially responsible for the ceremony in the case of his son, while the mother and her female relatives solely attend to it in the case of the daughter. In other words it provides a social emphasis on the child's alignment with its sex group. The distinction between male and female circumcision is reflected in Classical Arabic by the use of two different words—'khatan' for the boy, and 'khafd' for the girl. In the colloquial language of the village, circumcision of the boy is sometimes referred to as 'cutting his pigeon' while in the case of a girl it is described as 'cutting her cockscomb'. The operation is not suddenly performed on the child, but the mother, especially in the case of her son, may attempt to prepare him gradually for the event by caressing his organ and playfully endeavouring to separate the foreskin from the glans. While doing this, she would hum words to the effect that what she is doing will help to make him to become a man amongst men. In a community with rigid sex dichotomy, it is not surprising to find that it is a great fright, or a source of great resentment, for a small boy to be threatened by his mother that she will circumcise him, and for the girl to be threatened to be circumcised by the father. Such a threat by a parent of the opposite sex to the child is considered by the parents as one of the most dire threats that can be uttered, and it is thus used to help the child in identifying himself with the parent of his own sex.

¹ *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Article on 'Circumcision', p. 666.

INDIGENOUS LEARNING AND TEACHING

876 is to this day judged by the amount of the Koran and the number of prophetic traditions which he can quote, and the number of proverbs and maxims he can bring into the argument. It is not surprising then that out of some twenty learned religious men in the village, five of them are well known for their perfect memorization of the Koran, two for the memorization of many poetic verses of the Sheikhs of the Nakhshabandia sect, thus becoming the leaders of the order in the village, while two others are acknowledged as the most able reciters of verses and charms to ward off the 'evil eye'. From the linguistic point of view, for the speaker to claim that he knows a great deal about a particular thing, event, or person, is for him to assert that he 'memorizes it, or him, to the best of his memory'.¹

779
788
876 The writer is inclined to assume that the Islamic culture, or at least as it is practised in the Silwa community, emphasizes and fosters rote learning, memory, and enumerative procedures. There is abundant evidence of this in the repetitive elements in greetings, in conversation, in the verses and choruses in folk singing, in the ritual of the mystical orders (zikr), in the need to know the ninety-nine attributes of God, and the thirty-three names of the Prophet, and in the traditional way of memorizing the Koran in the Kuttab. In this connection, MacDonald says, 'Moslem practice was to repeat aloud until the thing was learnt—that is, by heart. They had observed, too, that no special thought was called for, only continued repetition.'²

876
[153] In stating that the village culture mainly stimulates memory as the most important cognitive process one does not necessarily imply that people in the village have good memories. This emphasis on memory could be related to what Bateson calls the *eidos* of a culture, meaning by it that a culture might have a bias for the standardization of the cognitive aspects of the personality of its participants expressed in their cultural behaviour.³ One is tempted here to ask a similar question to that posed by Bateson himself as to what extent this bias for amassing knowledge is limited only to a small number of specialists. In attempting an answer, it must be remembered that the stimulation of a small number of specialists can react on the culture as a whole; they have set themselves up as the leaders of the village life both in religious and social matters. From this it is fairly justified to conclude, as Bateson did, that 'the individuals most affected by the stimulation of memory actually contribute very much more than their fellows to the elaboration and maintenance of the culture'.⁴

¹ The equivalent phrase to this in the colloquial language of the village is 'haklanuh hifl', in classical Arabic 'ahfathuh hiftha'.

² MacDonald, *Aspects of Islam*, New York, 1911. The resort to rote learning has been the bane of education in modern schools. Criticisms of students' 'parrot-like' work are abundant in many of the official Government Reports. See E. Claparède, *Rapport Général Présenté au Ministère de l'Instruction Publique*, Cairo, 1909; F. O. Mann, *A Report on Certain Aspects of Egyptian Education*, Cairo, 1909; Ministry of Education, *Report on Secondary Education*, Cairo, 1933.

³ Gregory Bateson, *News*, p. 220.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 226-7.

THE VILLAGES AND THEIR INHABITANTS

peacemaker arrives in time a serious disturbance can usually be avoided. 978

The accounts given in subsequent chapters of blood-feuds, inter-village fights, and other crimes of violence should not, however, cause the reader to pass too harsh a judgment on the Egyptian peasants if he will but bear in mind that the violent contrasts in the physical features of the country are reflected in the psychology of the inhabitants collectively and individually. 181
133

The *fellahin* form the bulk of the population of Egypt, and the 162
119
101



FIG. 4. A VILLAGE ON THE BANKS OF THE BAHR EL-YÜSUF

larger number of them are Muslims. The Copts, who at one time were far more numerous than they are at the present day, are scattered about all over the country, though in a few towns and villages they may form the greater part of the population. The word 'Copt,' it must be borne in mind, does not denote a racial, but rather a religious, distinction.

The Beduins (Arabic *Bedu*, singular *Bedawī*), many of whom still lead a more or less nomadic desert life, and the Arabs, who have settled down as cultivators of the soil, also form a not inconsiderable portion of the population. Their facial features and certain styles of dress distinguish them from the native inhabitants. Nubians, Sudan negroes, Turks, Greeks, Syrians, and Jews are also to be found in large numbers, the four latter peoples chiefly in Lower Egypt, though they do not altogether confine themselves 162
101
142
503

THE FELLÄHIN OF UPPER EGYPT

152
593 I fancy that there was really no just cause for the woman's jealous suspicions. However, she has reduced her husband to a state of abject fear lest he may arouse her anger—though I did hear that on one occasion he had plucked up sufficient courage to exercise his 'rights' as a husband, and so had administered a whipping for some fault she had committed!

462
241 With regard to the division of labour among the sexes, the men certainly have the hardest and largest share, the most strenuous work in the fields being invariably done by them. The women and girls join their menfolk in the cultivation after the sun has risen, but their work is usually confined to the gathering of dry roots, tending the cattle, fetching the water for the household (Fig. 16), and so on. Of course, living is simple among the peasants, so that very strenuous work for the women is not necessary. Much, however, that might be done by them is neglected simply because they are without training in domestic duties and do not realize what important work lies to their hands.

462
515 It is, of course, very difficult for the peasants to be as clean as they should be. All the water has to be fetched by the women, often from some distance. No water is laid on in the villages, no bathrooms exist, and the houses lack the most ordinary domestic offices. Excuses must, therefore, be made for the Egyptian women, who have had none of the advantages of the poorest woman in England. The instinct of the Egyptian *fellāhin*, however, is to be clean, and the religion of Islām commands ablutions. A man will almost instinctively strip and bathe if he happens to be near a canal or the river, but this privilege is denied to the women, as modesty forbids their bathing in public.

834
854
562 One of the most crying needs in Egypt is that both girls and women should have instruction in the care and upbringing of children. The children undergo a great deal of unnecessary suffering during the early years of their infancy; not because their mothers are lacking in affection, for Egyptian women are, as a rule, devoted mothers, but because they are so hopelessly ignorant.

164 The results of such ignorance more often than not leave an indelible mark on the child, such as defective eyesight or even absolute blindness. To prevent or cure disease in their children the women will go to one magician after another and purchase from them amulets and written charms, not grudging for a moment the expenditure of what may be to them considerable sums of money.

40
[Text continues on page 42]

THE FELLÄHIN OF UPPER EGYPT

764
151
[133] ululations of grief. Among them are professional wailers, whose lamentations are the loudest of all.

764
779 It should be noted here that the wailing and general uproar made by women at a death is quite contrary to the teaching of the founder of Islām, and many men among the peasants in Egypt have often expressed to me their disapproval of the practice. As will be seen later, this custom is one of the many survivals from ancient times

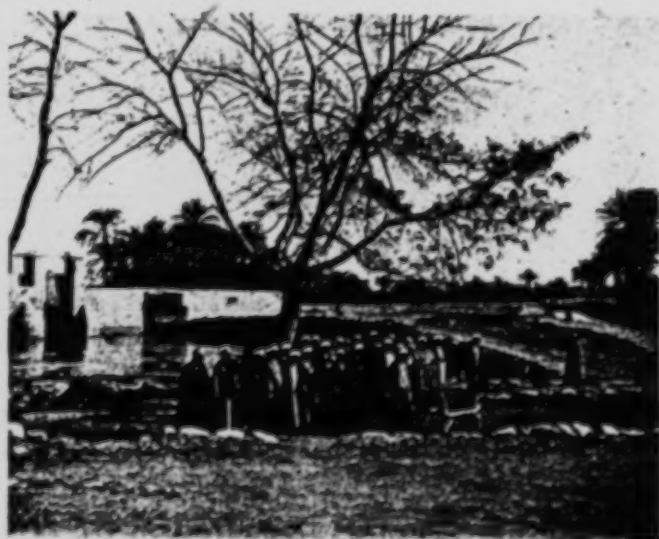


FIG. 52. THE HALT FOR PRAYER ON THE WAY TO THE CEMETERY

764
151 It is surprising for how long a time the women can keep up their wailing, which is pitched in a very high key. As a matter of fact, their throats are often so affected by the continuous uttering of these piercing cries that at the end of one day of mourning they can speak only in a whisper.

On its way to the grave the funeral procession halts at a specially chosen spot, and the bier is placed on the ground (Fig. 52). The men stand in rows, one behind the other, and assume a deeply reverential attitude, while a *ḥāfiẓ* (plur. *ḥafāẓ*; see p. 172) recites passages from the Korān, the assembled men often joining in. When these recitations are finished the bearers come forward and raise

F
144 type is dominant, and the other recessive. This absorption
174 of neighbouring and therefore not unnaturally somewhat
175 similar elements by a settled people of greater vigour and
numbers seems a logical process. Had the invaders or im-
migrants arrived in millions, had they come from Germany
or the Balkans, they might perhaps have imposed their own
type, despite the influence of climate and way of living.
But the deserts on East and West, the depth inland to the
South, and the unusual character of the Nile Valley, as well
as the density of the original population, have kept the
country free from all mass immigrations.

Thus both geographical and historical factors have con-
spired to preserve the Egyptian type. The country popula-
tion especially retains a facial appearance distinguishing it
among the countless mixtures of the Near East.

C
F
144 It has been said that the Copts are the purest represen-
779 tatives of the ancient stock. This is true in the towns,
186 where the Copts are usually the original inhabitants, while
the Moslems are for the most part descended from Arabs
and Turks, and have married women from any and every
country. Racial and physical differences are here very
clear. In the country, however, this theory does not fit the
facts. The fellahen who have remained Christian and those
who have become Moslems are of one and the same origin.
If the former for religious reasons marry only with Christians
and have thus kept the race pure, tradition has made the
latter no less exclusive. The antipathy between fellahen
and Bedouin makes marriages between them extremely
rare, and any union with a foreigner who may chance to live
in the village is considered scandalous in the extreme.

F
142 Thus it is possible, in describing the type, to generalise
without appreciable error.

The fellah is a heavily built man, though not stout. His
skull and face are broad, his forehead narrow, his eyes and
hair dark. He has rather prominent cheekbones, a thick
nose, full but not protruding lips, and a heavy jaw. His
features on the whole are rugged but not ill-favoured, and
are neither very sensitive nor very expressive. His thick
wrists, ankles and neck distinguish him from the supple
Bedouin. His back is rounded, his shoulders not so much
sloping as bent in towards the chest, and his hips narrow.

F
361 they build themselves a suburb on the outskirts of a town, as at Minia for example, it bears exactly the same appearance.

Some distinction may be made between villages according to their relative importance. There are the district capitals (*markaz*), the market towns and the centres of pilgrimage; these are big villages or townlets with more business, more movement and more institutions than the others (bank, court, police station, railway station); but no fellah centre has many of the amenities of a town. At the other end of the scale come detached but still dependent hamlets, such as the *'ezbas* of the big landowners and the Bedouin settlements (*nag'*) on the edges of the cultivation.

F
511 The standard of living is practically invariable everywhere, and to study an average village is to know all the rest.

184 Let us choose a village at random and look, before we enter it, for any signs of communal life which can be seen from its outskirts.

F
361 In Europe it is often said that the church building gives its character to the village. In Egypt too the mosque (or the Coptic church) is the largest and most solid building, but 346 there is nothing remarkable about it in point of architecture. Even if it has a minaret or a bell-tower, it gives no special character to the village, for it rarely rises above the poverty and mediocrity of its surroundings.

C
F
779 95% of the fellaheen are Moslems. There are about a million Copts, 40,000 of whom are Catholics. They live together with the Moslems in the same villages, each group following its own faith.

F
779 The Moslem fellaheen, among whom neither women nor children are counted, observe as faithfully as possible the 771 five fundamental precepts of the Koran: belief in one God, prayer, fasting, almsgiving and the pilgrimage. This much at least they know.

F
782 Of their belief in God something will be said later on. Prayers they say after ablutions in the evening, and several 796 times on Friday. When they hear the call of the *muezzin*, 516 they leave the women and children in the fields, and go off to the mosque, or more often to a cleared space used as such, a square of beaten earth at the water's edge surrounded by a low wall. There they pray together, or at least go through the prescribed gestures. Squatting on the ground or on

683 rushed upon the young man. He fell, pierced by several
579 knife wounds. Bakr's men, as soon as they heard of the
crime, bore down on the spot with rifles and staves, crying
"Allah, Allah!". The others replied with the same cries,
and the battle began in earnest. An hour later there were
three dead and many wounded. By midnight the two parties,
determined to fight to the death, had taken up positions in
the hills. The police had the greatest difficulty in restoring
order.

186 Race hatred between Arab and fellah, and religious hatred
● 779 between Copt and Moslem, though lulled by common lives
and interests, are never completely extinguished, and furnish
the explanation of many a drama.

571 So trust and mistrust persist side by side. The main
181 source of both is the soil, which unites the fellaheen if it is
186 threatened, but divides them as they own or covet it. Thus
[62] the peasant group, united against the outside world, is
divided within itself. Patriotism and nationality mean no
more to the fellaheen than the ideas of co-operation, public
interest, or civic pride. The village in Egypt is not a com-
munity in the social sense; it is not an organism, but a mass.

Similarity in their mode of life, and propinquity, do
not necessarily create a deep relationship among human be-
ings. A certain spiritual life is needed, or at least a certain
personality, to make social relations possible. The fellah
appears to be as little of a personality as he is of an in-
dividual. Absorbed in the soil, and oppressed by those above
him, he lives collectively but not socially. Though living in
a herd, he remains solitary and aloof.

This absence of co-ordination among elements in them-
selves homogeneous has kept the Egyptian village, the typical
peasant group, in the primitive state of a conglomeration
lacking either material or intellectual system. Through
fifty centuries Government after Government has main-
tained this formlessness, as it greatly strengthens the central
authority.

Such are the common features of the fellaheen, and of the
14,000 places in which they live (").

183

771

"In sha Allah".

812

"In sha Allah's no good. We're talking business, and I want a definite promise".

437

"No in sha Allah, no cotton, ya khaudga, Good day".

771

776

181

'God will provide. God distributes His benefits, God protects the crops. God is with the patient. To everyone the fate which God has assigned him. We are from God, and to God we shall return. God is there. God will give in His own good time. Man proposes and God disposes. God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.' Such are the sentences of peasant theology. They encourage fatalism and deepen resignation, but they are often rich with all the splendour of filial obedience to the Divine Will.

776

772

The fellah believes in God as the Prime Mover and First of all Living. In spite of the poverty of his intellect, and his ignorance in matters of religion, his conception of God is admirably pure. God is the Almighty, the Just, the Good. All attributes are united in the word the peasant uses for God, *Rabbina*, our Lord and Master. To hear a fellah utter this word is to be convinced of his faith.

771

782

785

The superstitions which enmesh his soul have not corrupted the essence of his faith. The fellaheen are far more given to prayer and asceticism than other people, for they are by nature believers. They have always been powerfully attracted by sacredness (*baraka*), the supernatural, holiness, or even the appearance of those things.

779

793

771

The Catholics among the fellaheen, whom the writer knows best, can be splendidly religious in their lives, even to the point of heroism. Those of their priests who are fellaheen live among them and for them with a devotion and self-denial of which missionaries from Europe would rarely be capable. It must not be forgotten that the first monks of the Christian world, the monks of the Thebaid, were fellaheen (").

1.

Morning Hymn.

539*

This little hymn was sung very often by our boys, — always [461]
in the morning, during the first hours of work.

*U-ṣabahna 'aṣḍin Alla,
'ala babak, ya kerīm, yalla,
'ala bah min fataḥ abwābak.
Wa-la ḥaul wa-la 'aṣwa illa-bak.*

In the morning we turn to Allah.
At thy door (we stand), thou gracious one, Allah,
At the door of him, who hath opened thy doors of mercy.
And there is no might and no strength save in thee.

3. The Prophet Mohammed has opened to mortals the doors [779] ●
to Allah. [796]

4. A frequently used formula, founded on a Koran verse.

114.

539 Two people conversing. Ll. 1—2 are the words of the
 832 man; ll. 3—5 are spoken by the woman.

Yabu-l-libās el-'aṭīfe
we-dikketo halahalla!
Gibt en-nabail, ya sīdī,
wad-da" lahḍar 'ala ṭidī!

5 *Ya Moslimīn waḥḥadu Alla!*

[292]

"Thou with the velvet trousers
 The lacings of which are so fine!"

[301]
 [304]

"I have put on the bracelets, sir,
 And the green tatooing is on my hand!"

[779]

5 Ye Moslems, testify to the oneness of Allah!"

4. Regarding the tatooing of the hands compare the remark on No. 64. l. 3.

5. The Egyptian sees nothing improper in combining pious expressions with most questionable matters.

115.

Ta'alā-li, ya wad, ta'alā-li,
taḥṭe sugaret yūḥ, ya ḡazālī!

Come to me, my lad, O, come to me
 Under the tree of delight, O my gazelle!

[112]

2. For "delight", the Arabic has a characteristic exclamation of pleasure (yūḥ!).

CHAPTER III.

WORKING DAYS AND HOLIDAYS, DAYS OF JUBILEE AND DAYS OF MOURNING.

WORKING-DAY LIFE OF THE COMMON PEOPLE.

512 In Upper Egypt the life of the ordinary inhabitant of the
513 towns is passed in a simple and uniform manner. Before
[183] sunrise he leaves his couch, performs the morning ablutions
[182] enjoined by his religion, and repeats his early prayer. To
[179] say his morning prayer after sunrise is forbidden by the
ordinances of his religion, and to allow the sun to rise above
one's slumbering head is universally regarded as prejudicial
to health. He then drinks his cup of coffee and smokes his
pipe, either at home or in the public coffee-house. His
breakfast, which he takes after his coffee (though sometimes
before it), consists of the remains of his meal of the previous
evening, or of cakes and milk, or for a trifle he procures from
the market the ever ready national dish of *ful*, that is, stewed
[264] beans. He then engages in his vocations, buys, sells, writes,
works, or moves about, all in the most comfortable, quiet,
and deliberate manner. "What is not done to-day may be
512 to-morrow"—in good Arabic, *bokra in shah Allah* (to-morrow
461 if God please)—stands written on his forehead in large letters.
[539] The most urgent affairs leave always a quarter of an hour
[62] free in which to gossip with acquaintances over coffee and a
pipe, be it in retail-shop, workshop, or office. And if many
acquaintances turn up the more numerous grow these quar-
ters-of-an-hour. Now and again he has no work, or no desire
[574] to do it, and then he drags himself from one friend to the
512 other. Bread for himself and his family will no doubt turn
[539] up; *robinna kerim*—"the Lord is gracious (or liberal);" it is
[62] but little he requires, and in case of necessity his soft-hearted
[182] neighbour will not allow him to go supperless to bed. Even
before the mid-day call of the muezzin from the minaret, he

[p. 158]

[pp. 1-157 not processed]

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

CEREMONIES PRELIMINARY TO FAMILY FESTIVALS 187

it, and lets the sweet fluid trickle from his consecrated mouth into that of the child, and "gives him the name out of his mouth." This is accordingly a kind of baptism. It is well known that among the Moslim, as among the native Christians, and till lately among the Jews of the West, only personal (and not family) names are used even in public life. For distinction the personal name of one's father is joined to one's own name, as Mohammed Soliman, that is, Mohammed, son of Soliman. Many have of course a surname, but it is generally personal, as for instance, the Bald, the One-eyed, the Falcon, and so forth, and only in rare cases is retained as a family name. In recent times the desire of acquiring a family name is showing itself, especially among government officials. This custom has of course the advantage that it leaves no room for pride of noble or patrician descent. Only the descendants of the prophets, the *sherifs*, of whom there are millions, pride themselves on their birth, and generally marry only among themselves. Still more the Bedouin, who is said to be able to repeat his pedigree in personal names alone up to Abraham and Adam, like the genealogies in the Bible, and who knows the pedigree of his horse equally well.

On the fortieth day after childbirth the mother goes with the child to the bath, and gets forty dishfuls of water poured over her head if her offspring is a boy, and thirty-nine if it is a girl. The child also is now bathed for the first time, and mother and child are now clean and purified.

CEREMONIES PRELIMINARY TO FAMILY FESTIVALS

The more important family festivals, as a circumcision or a marriage, are often preceded by a whole round of preliminary ceremonies that last for weeks, or even months, and take place every evening. The master of the house prides himself in giving a feast that will be long spoken of. Every evening he gathers together his friends in his hospitable dwelling, and provides for them amusements and entertainments of every form and kind. At present chess, draughts, dominoes, and other games are played, but not for money, or at most for a

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

188

UPPER EGYPT.

527
524
[779]
[213]

trifle, since games of chance are strictly forbidden by the Mohammedan religion, as well as wine and fermented liquors generally. The loser is often jeered, and has his forehead stamped with his own seal as a mark of disgrace; but if he then beats his opponent the latter has to wipe off the mark with his own robe, and is marked by the other.

527
[533]
[535]

Next day a grand *Fantasia* is held (a general name given by the Arabs to an entertainment where anything merry is to be seen or heard) in the form of a dance with music and singing. Such an entertainment has little resemblance to a Frankish ball, which has accordingly preserved its own special name of *ballo*. In the court, or the space in front of the house, even though this be the street, carpets and straw mats are spread, benches are placed, and many-branched candelabra and brilliant paper lanterns or oil-lamps with coloured water are suspended above the scene of the nocturnal festivities. Soon after night-prayer everybody flocks to the spot,

[354]

527
535
[242]
[301]

high and low, young and old, invited and uninvited. A number of dancing-girls step up. They take off their street mantles and display themselves in their richest attire, from the gold-embroidered skull-cap, and gold trinkets round the neck and over the heart, to the silken bows upon the polished boots; but on such a public occasion there is no impropriety. The dancing-girls of the ancient Egyptians appear to have worn a very transparent dress; they also are often represented as quite naked; even the short skirts of the modern ballet-girl are seen in some representations. The hair of our dancing-

[302]

girls smoothed, oiled, and plaited, their dotted faces, their rich and gaudy dresses—all is faultless. The childish forms seem to have become filled out, the haggard faces under the mystic half light of the illumined darkness and the effects of the "Joseph's beauty" (rouge) have recovered their youthful freshness; the really pretty have become charming. The orchestra has already taken up its position on the ground; some gray-bearded fathers are strumming on the two strings of their spindle-shaped fiddles; a jolly musician blows the reed-clarinet; matrons with buckram voices sing to plaintive tunes, beat hand kettle-drums and swing cymbals or tam-

533
534
527

RELIGIOUS ENTERTAINMENTS

101

of an improvement on that of the female dancer. Clothed and tricked out like a dancing-girl, he goes through the same kind of motions on another evening to the delight of the spectators. Sometimes he also plays on some instrument, and sings as well; he blows his bagpipes full of wind, and while it escapes melodiously from the holes of the tubes under the play of his fingers he strikes up his ear-piercing song, which is followed by the hip-dance—a threefold artistic effect produced all at once. This class of hermaphrodites, the product of the luxurious East, also resemble the dancing-girls in their abandoned morals. 535
527
[533]
[534]
[838]

RELIGIOUS ENTERTAINMENTS

In this round of festivities entertainments of a religious kind must not be absent, and they are commonly, on these and other occasions, the only ones that are held. They are not called *fantasies*; it is considered very far wrong in any one to call them so. The *chatmeh* or public reading of the whole Koran at one spell begins at vespers. From that until night, and from night-prayers to next morning, the whole of the Koran is gabbled over by school-masters, corpse-washers, and other similar functionaries who can read. The readers of the Koran speak and sing in the paternoster style, in a tone as if cajoling themselves and God, and breathlessly hurrying to the end; the words, nevertheless, have an imposing effect through the emphatic and melodious expression in which they are clothed, and the greater the more mystical they are. The guests, illumined by the blessing arising from the sound of the divine words, converse about all kinds of worldly matters. Indeed they do not generally understand the meaning of the words any more than the readers, and perhaps often the author himself. They do not wish to understand, since the truth of the Koran is raised above all doubts, and to reflect on its meaning, and especially to criticise it, like the *seilosuf*, were worthy of hell fire. The Koran contains mingled together dreamy unintelligible passages, platitudes, repetitions, contradictions, unexpected digressions, 796
[527]
779 ●

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

192

UPPER EGYPT.

- 779 curses and threatenings against unbelievers, but often also deeply moral ideas and regulations, and wonderful poetry. The statutes of the Koran, the religion of Islam, are apt to lead adherents of the faith to hypocrisy and fanaticism, and interpose the barrier of fatalism and superstition to effort and progress (this, however, is contested by enlightened Mohammedans); but this religion, more, perhaps, than any other, has acted as a bond of union, has formed and united nations together, and has been able to preserve the old patriarchal virtues up to the present day, of which respect for old age, hospitality, and to some extent also female virtue, are the most to be commended.

[173]
[796] Another religious reading is the *mulid*, that is, the genealogy of the Prophet, in which the forefathers of the latter, from Adam onwards, are enumerated and their praises sung.

786
796

Among the favourite devotional observances are those well-known religious gymnastical exercises called *sikr*. Those taking part in them form a circle or a line. At one end the leader (*munshak*) of the singing seats himself, and sings an ode, which at one time is deeply poetical and religious, at another, through images and similes, like the Song of Solomon, becomes lascivious and indeed obscene. The people sit with their legs crossed, and keep time to the melody of the singer with an uninterrupted "Allah," at first slow, solemn, in a deep bass, turning the head alternately right and left. Gradually the time and the movement of the head become quicker, the upper part of the body takes part in the movements of the head, the "Allah" becomes an "A A Allah." They then assume a kneeling posture and move the body madly about, still keeping time, however, and each like his neighbour. In the third stage the company of pious gymnasts rise to their feet, and their movements become more and more frantic. They pant, they moan, they groan, their voices sound hoarser, they stutter, they yelp out, "Ha, Ha, Allah," and thus for hours the frenzy continues. One or other of them is now sure to drop, becoming giddy, or being [877] attacked by spasms and convulsions. This, however, attracts